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The impact of anger on donations to victims

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Abstract

This article investigates if and when anger appeals (communications that elicit anger in people), can be used to increase donations to charity. In an experimental study the idea was tested that anger leads to higher charitable donations, under the condition that people can restore equity with that donation (i.e., restore the harm done to the victim). Results indeed show that when one's donation serves a specific restorative function (i.e., compensates the suffering of women so that they can start a new life) as compared to a non-restorative function (i.e., offers help in special crisis centers for women, to alleviate their suffering and not worsen their situation), angry participants donated more to charity. This difference was absent when people did not experience anger. Furthermore, angry people donated more to the restorative charity than people not experiencing this emotion. The effect of anger on charitable donations occurred independently from people's empathic concern. These results thus suggest that anger can act as an emotional appeal in soliciting charitable donations.

Keywords

Anger, victim, charity, donation, empathy

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Emotional appeals are often used in advertising to persuade people to allocate their resources to some desired good; to buy a particular product or service or to donate money to charity. Popular emotions in such appeals are fear and guilt (e.g., Hastings et al., 2004; Hibbert et al., 2007; Witte and Allen, 2000), and sometimes regret (Landman and Petty, 2000; Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004). The idea behind emotion appeals is that by making people for example feel fearful, motivations to act on this emotion are activated. If the product offered by the advertiser then offers a way to satisfy these motivations people should be more inclined to acquire the product. Research has shown that making people afraid of dental pain can induce them to brush their teeth more often because they are motivated to avoid what they fear (e.g., Janis and Feshbach, 1953). Similarly, fund-raisers use guilt appeals and offer guilt-reducing solutions to persuade people; depicting a sick, needy person in a charity fundraising advertisement may motivate people to donate money because they want to reduce their guilt over being better off (Basil et al., 2008; Hibbert et al., 2007). The research in this article focuses on the effects of another emotion that may be an important motivator of charitable giving, namely anger. Anger may be less readily thought of when thinking about motivating people to engage in constructive behaviors – indeed, it seems that anger appeals have never been used in persuading people. Yet, as we will outline below, there are good theoretical as well as empirical reasons to believe that anger appeals can effectively motivate prosocial behavior and that this influence is independent from that of other emotions.

Anger and prosocial behavior

Anger might have been overlooked as an emotion that can be used in persuasive communication because it is generally thought of as an intense, negative emotion with only negative behavioral inclinations (such as aggression, antisocial behavior, and punishment; for a review, see Van Doorn et al., 2014). However, anger can also have prosocial consequences such as compensating victims and helping the disadvantaged (Iyer et al., 2007; Montada and Schneider, 1989; Waksak et al., 2007). These prosocial consequences mostly occur when anger is experienced in third-party situations – when people get angry over harm done to another person.

Anger, like any specific emotion, is linked to specific concerns and goals (Bagozzi et al., 2000; Frijda, 1988; Han et al., 2007; Wetzer et al., 2007; Yi and Baumgartner, 2004; Zeelenberg et al., 2008). In third-party situations, anger is often a reaction to perceived violations of equity, such as when an unjust or unfair situation elicits an inequitable relation. Consequently, behaviors that are motivated by anger have the goal of restoring equity (e.g., Scherer, 1984; Stillwell et al., 2008; see also Nasr Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Raihani and McAuliffe, 2012). Inequity can be resolved by punitive, antagonistic behavior aimed at the perpetrator, but also by compensating the disadvantage of the victim.

Studies have reported people engaging in compensatory behavior following experiences of anger. For example, Montada and Schneider (1989) studied the impact of various emotions on the readiness to engage in prosocial activities in favor of the disadvantaged. Participants were confronted with scenarios describing the problems and misery of different groups of people. Results showed that anger was a predictor of prosocial commitment (e.g., claiming support for the disadvantaged, blaming political and economic leaders, and the spending of money for charitable goals), and that it was even more so than existential guilt and sympathy. Another example can be found in Iyer et al. (2007) who showed that anger aimed at one's own group predicted compensation toward the outgroup: American and British participants (ingroup) who perceived their

countries to be responsible for illegitimate conditions in occupied Iraq (outgroup) reported more anger; and anger, in turn, predicted action intentions to advocate compensation to Iraq.

It is important to note that such prosocial effects of anger can occur independently from feelings of empathy. In other words, it is not the case that anger towards a perpetrator leads to punishment while co-occurring empathy towards a victim leads to compensation. Although empathy can lead to compensation (e.g., Bagozzi and Moore, 1994; Batson et al., 1981; Blader and Tyler, 2002; Leliveld et al., 2012), this effect is orthogonal to the effect of anger, which can incite both punishment and compensation. Evidence for this position can be found in Lotz et al. (2011) who showed that regardless of whether or not victims knew they had been victimized, anger predicted participants' compensation for the victim. The goal of empathy is to comfort someone, but if the victim does not know about the unfair allocation there is no one to comfort. Anger does not depend on the victim's knowledge because it reacts to the inequity of the distribution and hence can motivate compensation even in the absence of such knowledge. A similar idea has been suggested by Blader and Tyler (2002), who argued that both justice principles and empathy can lead to prosocial behavior. Justice theory suggests that we feel concerned even when a loathsome person for whom we feel little empathy is the victim of injustice and the emotion appraisal literature shows that injustice is an important elicitor of anger (Mikula et al., 1998).

When equity or justice is already restored the motivation to act decreases, in line with the goal-directed nature of anger. For example, research by Van de Calseyde et al. (2013) revealed that when a victim had already been compensated by an insurance company, people recommended less severe punishment for the criminal. Goldberg et al. (1999) showed that anger elicited by injustice carried over to judgments of unrelated acts of harm *only* when a perpetrator went unpunished. These results suggest that when equity is restored, the need for punishment disappears. These findings imply that angry people only act if their actions can contribute to righting the wrong. Put differently, angry people only act when their behavior can still serve the goal of restoring equity. Thus, it can be expected that people also only act *prosocially* towards a victim when equity still needs to be restored.

Emotional appeals

Emotional appeals can be used as a tool to persuade people. Such appeals have been shown to lead to attitudinal and behavioral change. For example, a meta-analysis revealed that fear appeals are an effective marketing tool when the advertisement or message is severe enough (Witte and Allen, 2000), although field research evaluations of fear appeals usually reveal that fear has weaker effects in real-world campaigns (Hastings et al., 2004). Guilt appeals have been extensively studied as well. For example, Coulter and Pinto (1995) found that advertisements with moderate levels of guilt were more effective than strong guilt appeals in influencing participants' purchase intentions.

Outside a traditional consumer context, emotional appeals have been shown to be effective in charitable fundraising as well. Research on guilt convincingly showed that guilt can have interpersonal prosocial consequences towards victims (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; De Hooe et al., 2011; Ketelaar and Au, 2003). In emotional appeal studies, guilt has been shown to induce higher donations, in relation to persuasion knowledge (knowledge about persuasion tactics and charities), agent knowledge (beliefs about the characteristics, competencies, and goals of the charity; Hibbert et al., 2007), a sense of responsibility (Basil et al., 2006), and experienced empathy and self-efficacy (Basil et al., 2008).

In light of the existing emotional appeals research it is surprising that anger has never been considered by fundraisers, especially in view of the observation that anger can induce compensatory behavior independently from empathic concerns in situations of third-party inequity. Bagozzi and Moore (1994) did find that exposure to an anti-child abuse public service advertisement induced anger, sadness, fear, and tension which in turn increased helping behavior. However, they did not study the separate effects of each emotion, leaving it unknown as to what the specific contribution of anger to helping behavior was. The study of anger as a potential emotion appeal is important because many charities are aimed at people who are the victim of injustice or inequity. Anger motivates a goal to restore such justice or equity, and charities often deal precisely with this restorative goal.

Anger as an emotional appeal

Based on previous theory and findings it is predicted that anger leads to higher charitable donations, under the condition that people can restore equity with that donation (i.e., restore the harm done to the victim). If the donation does not serve a specific restorative function, angry people should not be inclined to donate more than people not experiencing anger. In the experiment reported in this paper empathic concern was also measured so as to be able to assess the unique effect of anger. Two hypotheses were tested:

H1: Anger, independently from empathy, leads to more charitable giving when the donation serves a restorative goal;

H2: Empathy, independently from anger, leads to more charitable giving irrespective of whether the donation serves a restorative goal.

Method¹

One hundred and twenty-eight students (20 males, 105 females, 3 unspecified, mean age = 19.50, standard deviation = 2.22) were randomly assigned to an anger or a control condition. Participants first described a situation in which they felt angry (anger condition), or a regular day of the week (control condition). Such recalls are a common method of emotion induction (e.g., Strack et al., 1985). Recalling a situation in which an emotion was experienced reactivates this emotion and associated motivational tendencies. After the recall, participants indicated how much anger, happiness, shame, regret, sadness, and guilt they felt, on rating scales running from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('very strongly').

Next, participants read about two different charities: OneMen, focused on repairing the negative consequences suffered by women who are victim of human trafficking, and Doctors Without Borders (DWB), focused on taking care of women who lost everything due to natural disasters. In the case of OneMen participants read: 'With your contribution, OneMen will compensate the suffering of these women so that they can start a new life'. In the case of DWB participants read: 'With your contribution, Doctors Without Borders will offer help in special crisis centers for women, to alleviate their suffering and prevent deterioration of their situation'.

Participants were asked to imagine that they had an extra €50 to spend this month and to indicate how much they were willing to donate to either of these charities, on a scale of €0 to €50 with intervals of €5. They also indicated which of the charities (OneMen/women trafficking or DWB/natural disasters) they found most important, and which of the charities' goals they thought

Table 1. Means (*M*) (and standard deviations (*SDs*)) of emotions experienced, donation intention, and charity importance as a function of condition.

Emotions	Condition		<i>t</i> (126)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Anger (<i>n</i> = 64) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Control (<i>n</i> = 64) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			
Anger	3.30 (1.22)	1.33 (0.76)	10.99	0.000	1.94
Guilt	1.50 (0.78)	1.14 (0.39)	3.30	0.001	0.60
Shame	1.89 (1.16)	1.19 (0.53)	4.42	0.000	0.78
Regret	1.98 (1.22)	1.27 (0.51)	4.36	0.000	0.76
Sadness	2.84 (1.30)	1.34 (0.78)	7.91	0.000	1.40
Happiness	1.34 (0.72)	3.22 (0.95)	-12.59	0.000	-2.23
Donation (€)			<i>F</i> (1, 124)	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
OneMen	13.47 (11.69)	8.91 (9.94)	5.64	0.019	0.043
Doctors Without Borders (DWB)	10.73 (9.36)	11.09 (12.71)	0.03	0.854	0.000
Importance			<i>F</i> (1, 126)	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Charity	3.64 (1.51)	3.86 (1.36)	0.75	0.389	0.006
Goal of charity	4.25 (1.58)	4.19 (1.44)	0.06	0.815	0.000

Notes: Emotions could range from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('very strongly'). Means in bold represent the dominant emotion experienced within that condition, with all *ts* > 2.61, all *ps* < 0.011, *ds* > 0.33. Higher scores on the donation measures indicate higher amounts of euros donated to each charity. The mean in bold is the charity that is donated most to within the anger condition, *t*(61) = 2.07, *p* = 0.043, *d* = 0.26. There was no difference within the control condition: *t*(63) = -1.31, *p* = 0.195, *d* = -0.16. Scales of both importance measures ranged from 1 ('OneMen is most important') to 7 ('DWB is most important'). Within the anger and control conditions, participants judged both charities and the goals they represent as equally important (as the means did not differ from the midpoint), *ts* < 1.91, *ps* > 0.061, *ds* < 0.24.

was most important (OneMen: compensation to women; DWB: offering help to women), both measured on a scale of 1 ('OneMen is most important') to 7 ('DWB is most important') with the midpoint (4) being 'Both OneMen and DWB are equally important'. Participants then completed the 7-item empathic concern scale (α = 0.80; Davis, 1983, 1994). Finally, participants were thanked, debriefed, and received course credit for their participation.

Results

Means, standard deviations and relevant statistics are shown in Table 1. Participants in the anger condition reported more anger than participants in the control condition; within the anger condition, participants reported more anger than all other emotions. This pattern of results shows that the manipulation of anger was successful. Furthermore, univariate tests showed that participants in the anger condition donated significantly more to OneMen than participants in the control condition, but no such effect was found for donations to DWB. Within the anger condition, but not within the control condition, participants donated more to OneMen than to DWB². Within the anger and control conditions, participants judged both charities and the goals they represent as equally important (as the means did not differ from the midpoint).

We next tested whether donation intention could be explained by empathic concern. A regression analysis showed that empathic concern was related to the amount of money participants donated to both OneMen and DWB, $\beta = 0.28$, $t = 3.22$, $p = 0.002$ and $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 2.40$, $p = 0.018$, respectively. When entering empathic concern as a covariate in analyses of covariance with Condition as an independent variable and donation intention to OneMen and DWB as dependent variables, the effects remain stable with $F(1, 123) = 4.93$, $p = 0.028$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$ for OneMen, and $F(1, 123) = 0.13$, $p = 0.722$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$ for DWB. Furthermore, anger did not correlate with empathic concern, $r = 0.12$, $p = 0.171$. Thus, the increased donations in the anger condition cannot be explained in terms of empathic concern.

Discussion

This article has presented the first empirical study of whether and when anger appeals lead people to donate more to charity. Results indicate that when a donation serves a specific restorative function (i.e., compensating the suffering of women so that they can start a new life) as compared to a non-restorative compensatory function (i.e., helping in special crisis centers for women, to alleviate their suffering and prevent deterioration of their situation), angry participants donated more to charity. This difference in donation intentions was absent when people did not experience anger. Furthermore, angry people donated more to the restorative charity than people not experiencing this emotion. These results suggest that anger can act as an appeal in soliciting charitable donations.

It is important to note that the effect of anger was independent from that of goal importance and empathy. Although angry people donated more to OneMen (i.e., the restorative charity), they did not think that OneMen itself or the goals it represents were more important than DWB (i.e., non-restorative charity). In other words, people were not just inclined to judge a charity as more important because they just donated more to that charity. Anger-induced donations occurred independently from empathy-induced donations. Empathy predicted charitable giving to OneMen as well as DWB, whereas anger only led to charitable giving in the case of OneMen. These results are in line with previous research suggesting independent prosocial effects of anger (e.g., Blader and Tyler, 2002; Lotz et al., 2011; Montada and Schneider, 1989).

Apart from demonstrating the effects of anger appeals, our results also broadly speak to the view that third party anger has an equity concern and an equity-restoring goal (Scherer, 1984; Stillwell et al., 2008; Van Doorn et al., 2014; see also Walster et al., 1973). Anger only led to a higher charitable donation when this could restore equity/justice. Showing prosocial consequences of anger of course does not imply that anger *per se* is a prosocial emotion; rather it means that prosocial consequences of anger are complementary to the negative and more well-known antagonistic behavior (e.g., Berkowitz, 1990; Bougie et al., 2003; Nelissen and Zeelenberg, 2009; Yi and Baumgartner, 2004) because both can serve the same goal.

Furthermore, although anger was the most dominant emotion experienced after our manipulation, this does not mean that participants did not experience any other emotions at all. In fact, the results showed that participants also experienced a fair amount of sadness. Research has shown that anger experiences often also involve experiences of sadness (e.g., Mills and D'Mello, 2014). However, emotions sharing the same valence (i.e., being a negative emotion) often do not share the same behavioral consequences. Sadness, in sharp contrast with anger, has sometimes been defined as an emotion without a goal for action (Zeelenberg et al., 2008). For example, Roseman et al. (1994) have shown that sadness is related to 'feel like doing nothing' or to the

specific act of crying, whereas anger has been characterized as an emotion that elicits (positive or negative) actions aimed at restoring justice (e.g., Scherer, 1984; Stillwell et al., 2008). These findings emphasize that experiences of, most dominantly, anger have influenced donation intentions in the current study.

It is important to note that this is an explorative and preliminary study testing the influence of anger on charitable donations to victims. Replicating this experiment with different charities is therefore an important next step. In doing so, one might also measure the emotional experience that the description of the different charities elicits and whether these descriptions in themselves can elicit an angry response. The current article aimed to answer the research question whether anger can promote charitable donations and under what conditions. Hence, a strong manipulation of anger was an essential element in the current study. The short description of the charities in itself would probably not have been enough to elicit intense anger, and if so, the charities would probably do so to the same extent. If the descriptions would have been more elaborate or if short video clips would have been used, then an exogenous manipulation of anger might not have been necessary.

Nevertheless, the results have important implications for fundraisers and charities, especially in the domain of injustice. Not only do these results suggest that inducing anger in potential givers might help in increasing donations, they also suggest that charities should be aware of what information is given to potential donors. Charitable campaigns are usually occupied with how to 'portray their victims' (e.g., Small et al., 2007), however, equally important for charitable campaigns is to be clear and informative about what goal is served with the money raised. As becomes clear from our experiment, the fact that the contribution of a donation is framed as having a restorative function versus a non-restorative function has a large effect on the magnitude of the donation. An important next step for future research is to investigate whether these findings generalize to actual charitable campaigns.

What do these findings mean for contexts other than charities? For example, does a judge's angry experiences prior to coming to court affect the amount that he or she determines? Research shows that prior emotional situations can indeed spill over to subsequent, unrelated situations. For example, Goldberg et al. (1999) showed that anger primed by a serious crime 'carried over' to influence judgments of unrelated acts of harm. But also, research by De Hooze et al. (2007) shows that feelings of guilt and shame influence participants' decisions to cooperate or not in an unrelated situation. This does not mean that emotional experiences always and automatically influence one's subsequent actions. Especially in the case of a judge in court, he or she is trained to ground the final verdict on factual information and this final verdict does not rely on one specific moment in time that might be colored by one's previous emotional experience.

To summarize, anger appeals lead to higher donations when this serves a specific restorative function (i.e., compensating the victim and helping her out of her disadvantageous position). This effect occurs independently from that of co-occurring empathic concerns. Hence, the current study provides an important demonstration of how a negative emotion such as anger can be used for eliciting prosocial behavior aimed at victims.

Notes

1. Allowing for reliable analyses, we aimed at recruiting a minimum 50 participants per condition. There were no data exclusions. All manipulations and all measures that were used in the experiment are reported. There were no gender effects on the emotions and charity measures.

2. There were two missing values in the anger condition on the donation to Doctors Without Borders measure.

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